



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 25 YEARS

## Celebrating Successes



Photo courtesy of Sally Hansen

The OCWC, as an organization will celebrate its 30th year anniversary in 2017. This fall we celebrate 10 years of our new program direction in which we moved from wildlife rehabilitation to Education and Outreach. Like most birthdays, it is a time to celebrate as well as reflect on the passing of time and what we have achieved.

Although initially it was difficult to reconcile the fact that since we were no longer helping wildlife in such a direct way, would we still be making a difference for wildlife? We soon realized that we did in fact make a difference and in many ways it was an evolution of our rehabilitation program, not a consolation prize.

It has given us the chance to give over 300 presentations, and work with more than 10,000 students, getting them excited about nature and the amazing animals we share our spaces with. We have worked with individuals, community groups and municipalities to find solutions that

resolve human wildlife conflicts in a way that is positive for people and wildlife.

Part of the success is the partnerships we have established with others and the leadership that some municipalities like Edmonton (see page 4 & 5) are demonstrating on behalf of forward-looking environmental initiatives.

It is interesting to reflect on the changes in people's attitudes towards wildlife, nature and our environment. On the surface, it may seem as if change is not happening, or that our changes are counterintuitive. An example is the realization about the importance of topics such as biodiversity in classrooms, yet many kids don't have the opportunity to go out and play and explore nature on a regular basis.

Most people would agree that we need clean water, but the growing evidence about the vital role wetlands play in this seems too often to go overlooked, and municipalities continue to allow devel-

*"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" - Aldo Leopold*

opment in these areas and replace them with constructed storm water ponds.

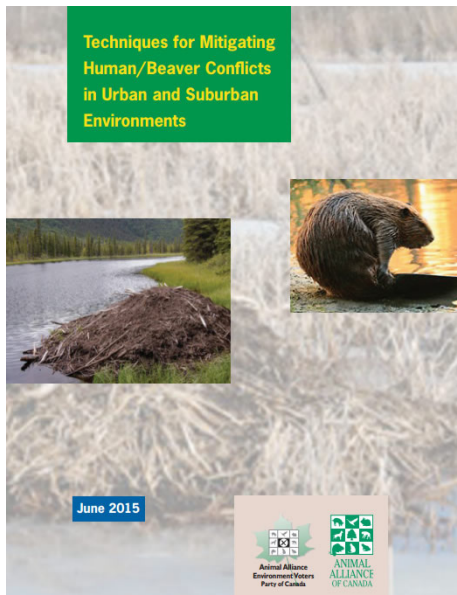
We are finally starting to appreciate the wealth of human health benefits that come from experiencing nature and biodiversity, yet human encroachment into natural spaces continues with little regard for the habitat destruction that occurs and few mitigation efforts on behalf of the species that reside there.

Sometimes it is as if we have so much information, that it is overwhelming, especially for the individual person and it is a challenge to know what to do or where to start.

But if you look at more of a micro level, in our experience, change is more evident. In the early years the majority of people we worked with and talked to had little appreciation for wildlife and didn't fully value their presence in our urban landscape. As well, they weren't aware of the role wildlife played in contributing to healthy environments. It also seemed the intrinsic value of nature was something that was easy to take for granted.

Now, fast forward to present day, where we have many people calling us about the protection of wildlife and habitat, they want to know what they can do to make a difference. It is very inspiring and encouraging to see people assuming responsibility for protecting the environment and the animals that are part of it.

# Mitigating Human/Beaver Conflicts – A Timely Manual



Animal Alliance of Canada is well-known and respected across the country as a tireless advocate for animals, domestic and wild.

This organization and its volunteers are not only an effective voice for exposing and challenging animal abuses and archaic government policies that desperately need to be changed but they go well beyond this role.

Whether putting its money where its mouth is in supporting a legal challenge or bringing in an expert to speak to a community about more humane practices in dealing with wildlife conflict, Animal Alliance of Canada is all about solutions.

For a number of years, Liz White, the Director of Animal Alliance has encouraged more progressive approaches in dealing with beaver conflicts. It led to the realization that there was a need for a comprehensive manual on better understanding the amazing contribution of this species and in outlining 'best management practices' in support of coexistence.

The result is a unique manual 'Techniques for Mitigating Human/Beaver Conflicts in Urban and Suburban Environments', with funding for its research and development provided by Animal Alliance. The information in the manual was compiled and developed by Emma Hawley-

Yan and reviewed by: Mike Callahan, Beaver Solutions; Barry Kent MacKay, director, Animal Alliance of Canada; and Donna DuBreuil, President, Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

*"The manual provides the tools that will allow wildlife managers to maintain beavers and their contributions to healthy ecosystems, while mitigating conflicts and ensuring public safety",* said Liz White.

When managing human/beaver conflicts, politicians, particularly those at the municipal level, play a critical role. The common view of municipal staff is that flow devices and tree-wrapping are unsuitable for urban areas. However, most areas of development being impacted by beaver activity are at the edges, in suburban areas. These areas were rural not that long ago, and the distinction between urban, suburban, and rural is becoming increasingly blurred. Solutions such as tree-wrapping and flow devices are effective in nearly every area if they are implemented properly.

Practices that focus on prevention are increasingly being demanded of municipalities by the public for a number of reasons. The growing push for green infrastructure solutions; fewer and shrinking wetlands along with rising awareness of the key role played by these areas; a growing body of research proving the importance of beavers to the environment and water quality and availability; the economic realization that preventative measures cost eight times less than reactive and repetitive measures, when costs buried in road, drainage, stormwater, and forestry budgets are considered.

Most important of all, however, is that stormwater ponds are very often in the view of the public, located in highly-populated neighbourhoods, and used for recreational purposes. People are horrified at the thought of animals struggling and dying in Conibear traps right beside their recreational paths, and there is the serious issue of public safety when kill traps are used in places where children and pets play.

*"As you see in this issue of the newsletter, a growing number of cities are adopting 'best*

## Editorial

### An Army of Change



The backlash over the death of Cecil, an African lion, by a trophy hunter, the annual outcry over animals that die unnecessarily in sporting events and the move of the food

industry to get on the right side of humane treatment of animals, shows that the public is increasingly unwilling to turn a blind eye to animal abuse.

However, the change in public attitudes goes well beyond. People are coming to realize we are part of nature, not just a dominant force that can manage and manipulate it without consequence.

As for the growing Army, it includes individuals like those in Stittsville that are trying to prevent the draining of an important wetland; community associations, high school students and residents in Westboro that have launched 'Big Trees of Kitchissippi' to save large and distinctive trees from infill development; the Friends of Huntley Highlands where natural areas are at threat from 'edge development'. Groups like Ecology Ottawa and Greenspace Alliance spearhead efforts that challenge bad planning and bring people together on behalf of better solutions.

What is particularly encouraging are those city governments putting in place innovative, award-winning, programs to protect wildlife and natural areas. Edmonton, Alberta is featured in this issue and we intend to continue to showcase progressive examples, with the hope that the City of Ottawa will join this list in the future.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC

*practices' that are based on cost-effective prevention and humane outcomes for wildlife. The Beaver Manual is a very timely contribution in helping those involved in wildlife management achieve these goals",* said Donna DuBreuil of the OCWC.



# "Caring for Wild Things"

## New Video Tells the Story of the OCWC



Education and Outreach

When Elizabeth Graham first made the generous offer to fund the production of a documentary on the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, although honoured, we were quite reluctant. Who would be interested, would it appear to be a personal vanity piece and how could the story of our transition from doing wildlife rehabilitation to public education be told in a 30 minute video?

Also, how to explain why we no longer did wildlife rehabilitation? The Ministry of Natural Resources' actions in seizing healthy baby animals which people had brought to the Centre for care and taking them to its research facility was widely condemned at the time. How to explain, the Ministry's actions in, what remains to this day, still inexplicable to the majority of the public?

Even more key, how to emphasize the importance of the Centre's current role in education and outreach? While not as visual as caring for young orphaned animals, it is crucial in changing the attitudes and circumstances that put these animals at risk in the first place.

Fortunately, Elizabeth persevered, using the production company she had chosen, Revelstoke Communications, to continue to follow up with us. We are certainly glad that she did. The video was completed this summer and we are delighted with it.

It tells the story of the Centre in a very understandable and compelling way, focusing on the students, volunteers, allied partners and special donors that have made our work possible. The video will be put to good use in presentations and on our revised website. We are especially grateful to Elizabeth for supporting an additional video that highlights Kate's educational work in area schools. It will be an excellent training tool for

those individuals that approach us for assistance in setting up similar programs in their community.

**Revelstoke Communications:** Revelstoke partners, Michelle Lavoie and Paul Huppe, spent many months researching the Centre's 28-year history, digging in archives and talking to others.

They are an exceptional team, each bringing special strengths to telling a story. Michelle, with a Master of Journalism degree is a meticulous and dogged researcher and skilled interviewer with years of broadcast experience. Paul, with 25 years in television and video production, did an outstanding job in producing, directing and editing the documentary.

**Elizabeth Graham:** We are grateful to Elizabeth's vision in recognizing, well before we did, the value of documenting the history and work of the Centre. In fact, a message being widely delivered today is the need to "*tell the organization's personal story*" in engaging and motivating the public to become more involved in social enterprises.

Tony and Elizabeth, founders of Tony Graham Toyota, have supported the Centre since it was established in 1987. Well-known philanthropists, their leadership on behalf of animal welfare is based on the same principles on which they built a successful business as well as contribute generously to a wide variety of social and health needs in the community.



*From 1987 to 2002 the Centre cared for almost 15,000 orphaned and injured wild mammals and responded to more than 100,000 human-wildlife conflict calls.*

# 'Best Wildlife Management Practices'

## – Celebrating Those Cities Taking the Lead in Canada



*Dual culvert to connect tributary with creek in Edmonton*

'Best practices' is a term an increasing number of municipalities are using with respect to the environment. However, those cities that stand out are ones like Edmonton, Alberta, where leadership, vision and determined follow through has actually put 'best practices' in place when it comes to protecting wildlife and biodiversity, demonstrating that actions speak louder than words.

It's not always easy to move beyond old ways of doing business but it is possible if there is a shared commitment between municipalities, conservation groups, residents and developers to enhancing the quality of life in their community.

Edmonton is certainly leading the way with respect to best practices when it comes to wildlife. The city is one of Canada's five largest, and fastest growing, municipalities with a population of close to 900,000 in a metropolitan region of 1.3 million. Edmonton's exceptional population growth has resulted in the rapid development of previously natural and agricultural landscapes.

By 2007, that growth required more development, introducing environmental pressures that prompted the city to set a course to balance environmental

protection with economic growth and the social fabric of their city.

Citizens everywhere are gaining a greater understanding of the impact they have on their natural environment. In Edmonton, a public opinion survey showed that 97% of its residents recognized the intrinsic value of natural ecosystems and supported their protection and restoration.

That public support required the city of Edmonton and its private industry to become leaders in addressing the needs of the city's protected areas and ecological connections as transportation and drainage networks were designed.

### Edmonton's Wildlife Passage Program

In 2007, the City of Edmonton initiated a wildlife passage program with the goal of maintaining habitat connectivity for the city's wildlife populations while also reducing human/wildlife conflict.

After 9 years of implementation, this program has resulted in the design of 27 wildlife passage structures resulting in a reduction of wildlife collisions by 51% despite additional road infrastructure and an increase in population of more than 160,000 people.

The biggest achievement of the program according to Grant Pearsell, Edmonton's Director of Parks + Biodiversity was in "overcoming the hurdle of having the city's planners, ecologists and engineers communicate with one another as each science brings its own language and expectations."

The turning point came in 2009 when his department hired an engineering con-



*First dedicated bridge structure (currently under construction) within Edmonton's inventory designed solely to meet the needs for multiple wildlife species passage, including large ungulates*

sultant to develop a set of guidelines for engineers, detailing exactly what parameters were needed to deal with each of the 11 classes of wildlife. It represented a paradigm shift as the city moved from focusing on the protection of isolated habitat patches to that of an Ecological Network Approach, using outcome-based planning to assess progress.

The result is a 250-page document 'Wildlife Passage Engineering Design Guidelines' that, along with the characteristics and habitat needs of a wide variety of species from mice to moose, identifies transportation and ecological network components, potential conflicts with wildlife and a detailed mitigation toolbox. Also included are Construction Guidelines, similar to those we wish to see implemented in the City of Ottawa.

This educational publication was developed by a multidisciplinary team that included ecologists, academics, planners, developers, environmental professionals, drainage engineers and transportation engineers. It provides all partners with easily understood and accessible information on wildlife passage design.



According to Grant Pearsell, *“the guidelines have influenced Edmonton’s engineering and design community to take a leadership role in the development of wildlife passage design within an urban environment and it has facilitated the incorporation of wildlife passages in the design of our city at the start of the planning process rather than as a last minute consideration at the detailed design stage.”*

The City has accomplished a great deal since the natural areas program was created in 2002 under the leadership of Grant Pearsell. *“We have been very fortunate to attract young staff that make it happen on the ground. This work is what makes them get up in the morning. Our successes would not have happened without them”,* said Pearsell.

The commitment that Edmonton has made to preserving its natural areas and the species that depend on these lands is reflected not only in this innovative program but the city has embedded its ecological network goal into its highest municipal planning document, the Municipal Development Plan with clear policies to guide and support this work.

A fundamental philosophy under Edmonton’s Natural Connections Strategic Plan is that conservation should be integrated into all the city’s decision-making processes. Edmonton, for example, is at the fore in protecting, managing and integrating natural wetlands into new and existing developments as key assets.

## Community Engagement

Understanding that biodiversity conservation requires public awareness and support, Edmonton, has made public engagement and education priorities within their planning efforts. This has been achieved through community events, education initiatives, workshops, and biodiversity-oriented programs where over 1,500 residents participated in at least one event.

The city’s Master Naturalist Program provides the community an opportunity



*This large underpass, constructed by the Province, permits crossings for all wildlife, including large ungulates, as well as passage for humans*

to complete 35 hours of training and field trips in exchange for 35 hours of stewardship volunteer service in areas such as natural area monitoring, inventory, naturalization, restoration and ecological education.

Future goals include a wildlife monitoring program for new wildlife passages (incorporating Citizen Science) and completion of a city wide restoration plan that will identify degraded ecological linkages.

## Measuring Success

According to Grant Pearsell, *“a large part of our success is the emphasis on the importance of innovation to our organization which is communicated regularly by our senior managers.”* This unique model of passage planning and design was built upon three innovative requirements:

- i. Application of the best available science in wildlife passage design adapted to a fragmented Urban Environment;
- ii. Communication of this information in a way that helps bridge the conversation between ecologists and transportation engineers; and
- iii. Integration of wildlife passage requirements into planning.

The project’s real success is how Edmonton’s ecological connectivity goals have been embraced by the private and public sector. Recognition for the program is coming from far and wide.

In 2015, the City was recognized by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (an organization dedicated to supporting municipalities across the world that are committed to sustainable development). *“The development of the Wildlife Passage Engineering Design Guidelines makes the City of Edmonton a global leader in wildlife passage in an urban environment. The guidelines can be shared to help guide other municipalities to a more sustainable future.”*

The project also garnered awards this year from the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators and the prestigious Alberta Emerald Foundation.

*“Edmonton’s wildlife passage initiative is one of those innovative programs that works to incorporate sustainability in our City. It encourages all of us to develop a new level of local expertise in wildlife passage design, which sets us apart from other municipalities.”*

- Edmonton developer



*Grant Pearsell’s title, Director of Parks + Biodiversity, reflects the City’s aspiration*

*to move its thinking from environmental assessment to ecological design.*

*Grant’s professional expertise, including a background in civil engineering combined with a degree in Environmental Studies and a Master’s degree in Urban Planning has been key in bringing multiple partners together in making this unique program a reality.*

# One in a Million



Even though we no longer do wildlife rehabilitation, the animals we have helped over the years are never far from our minds. In fact, having had the privilege of caring for these special animals has reinforced our commitment to giving people a better understanding of them.

It was Monday evening in the spring of 1998, my third day of work at the Wildlife Centre. I remember it like it was last week. I was doing the dishes in the kitchen, and Gary, the co-founder of the Centre, who I had only met briefly once before walked up to the counter.

He was very nicely dressed, as he had come straight from his day job as an administrator with the federal government. He said hello, and asked how things were going and then he asked if I wanted to see what was in his pocket. I used to be shy, so I just shook my head, wondering what I had gotten myself into. Today, I would likely have had a host of colourful responses. However, I can guarantee I never would have guessed the right answer. It was Vinnie, our non-releasable bat! Yes, you read correctly, a bat.

Vinnie arrived at the Centre as a pup, just a few weeks old. Now we always had a very clear policy that wildlife belonged in the wild, but Vinnie was one in a million and led to an exception. A bat that

couldn't fly could not be released and he was otherwise in perfect health. Vinnie's care was restricted to those staff members who were vaccinated, just to be on the safe side.

Before we found the perfect home for Vinnie he lived at the Centre. Occasionally he would join us for dinner,

where he would sometimes run down the conference table, very quickly I may add. He would chirp and move up and down when he was unhappy or wanted attention.

He also liked warm, dark places, and in addition to Gary's pocket he also loved hanging off Donna's bra. I realize we are starting to sound like the Adam's family, and for that reason we would try to be discreet about Vinnie's resting spots.

Staff knew but the contractors who frequented the Centre to take care of things like plumbing, heating, lighting and security already thought we were a bit unusual so we didn't think we needed to add to this.

One evening, a plumber was here, and he was explaining a problem to Donna. I guess Vinnie grew restless and needed to reposition, so he gave his wings a stretch and flapped and flittered until he was once again comfortable.

The plumber's eyes grew wide, initially because he saw Donna's shirt moving and thought she was having a heart attack and then because Donna told him she was fine it was simply Vinnie the bat, who was hanging from her bra! Now I have to give kudos to the plumber for not only keeping his cool but also for

## Bat Facts

- *The majority of the bats received when we were doing rehabilitation came in during the fall and winter months. If you find a bat in your house, it is important not to have any direct contact with it and to find a wildlife rehabilitator that can over-winter the bat. Do not put the bat outside in cold months as it will not survive.*
- *Roughly one in every five species of mammal is a bat, making them one of the most successful mammals.*
- *Fossils indicate that early bats had fully functional wings and could echolocate, meaning they were similar to modern bats.*
- *All bats found in Canada are insectivorous.*
- *Flying takes huge amounts of energy, an insect-eating bat must consume 50% of its body weight each night.*
- *The bats that don't migrate hibernate to survive the winter without food. If a bat wakes during hibernation it uses up a lot of energy. In some cases it requires the same amount of energy that would take it through 60 days of hibernation.*

continuing to work at the Centre with the "batty" staff.

We were fortunate to find a great home for Vinnie with an experienced volunteer, who was also vaccinated, where he lived out his life in a style fit for a king.



# The Latest on Ottawa's Wildlife Construction Protocol



The jury will remain out on Ottawa's Wildlife Construction Protocol – at least until the public sees whether the positive recommendations in the Protocol are actually put into force.

We expressed the Centre's disappointment at the Planning and Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee meetings in that the key implementation tool has been eliminated in the revised Protocol approved by these committees in late September and early October.

The removal of the requirement for developers to submit a Wildlife Mitigation Plan and Construction Site Management Plan will substantially eliminate the most effective means to reduce direct harm to wildlife during construction.

That the requirements in the Protocol have been replaced by 'best practices' guidelines only is concerning.

**'Best Practices' – a Useful Tool or Empty Rhetoric?** 'Best Practices' will mean little unless accompanied by an implementation plan, the City's will to support the plan and a demonstration of where recommendations are actually being applied. In that the onus has been removed from developers/contractors to submit plans for mitigation measures, it now rests squarely on planning staff to ensure that Protocol recommendations are part of the Conditions of Approval, particularly in the development of large natural areas where a variety of wildlife species will be impacted.

But, will planning staff consider this a priority? The controversial Client Relationship Leaders initiative undertaken by the City to provide a concierge service to developers increases, in many people's view, the already imbalance between the development industry and community interests when it comes to planning matters.

And, even if the Protocol's recommendations are considered a priority, is there the staff resource required to support it? It has already been identified that staff need to be more involved in carrying out the field work to ensure the accuracy of existing conditions reports and in supporting the proposed site alteration by-law. If the Wildlife Construction Protocol is to be successful, it will require staff to assist in implementing it and in ensuring that it is adhered to.

**Key Elements in a Successful Protocol:** Within the recommendations, the goal of avoiding the most sensitive times of year for the **initial** clearing of a site, when the greatest harm is done to wildlife will be an important element.

This includes winter when hibernating animals would be physically unable to escape and over-wintering species, forced to leave their dens and food caches, would likely freeze or starve to death. And, during the birthing season when newborns would have no chance of survival when nests or dens are destroyed with them in them.

As many of you have expressed, this is an aspect that will continue to get attention. People will not accept that living creatures which feel pain and suffering are not accorded the same degree of protection as trees receive under the City of Ottawa's Tree Conservation Guideline. The initial stripping, digging, moving of earth and felling of trees in large natural areas should not be an intentional death sentence for the animals that reside there.

Another priority item in the Protocol is to ensure that educational materials are provided for new homeowners and abutting neighbours. It is not only wildlife that suffer when there is a lack of wildlife planning but homeowners pay a high price in dealing with resulting wildlife conflicts, including animal removal and damage repair costs as well as facing the emotional difficulty of being left with orphaned young wildlife when inappropriate actions are unwittingly taken. Much of this can be avoided by having developers provide residents with proper information in advance.

**The Failure to Provide a Fair and Transparent Process:** If, as the City reported, the majority of the 106 submissions received were in support of the draft Protocol, why was it so significantly altered with respect to its implementation.

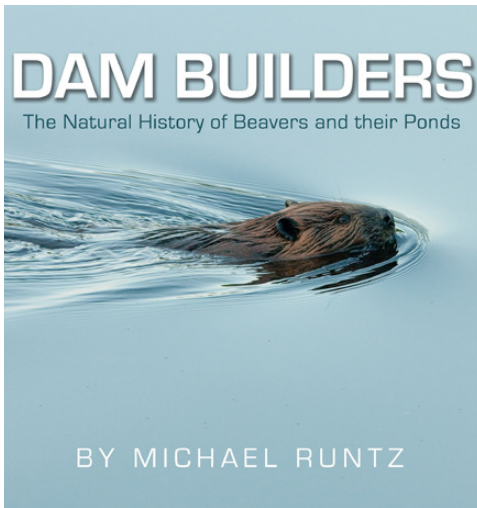
Unfortunately, we will never know the answer to this question. Although stakeholders were assured that all submissions, both in support and opposed, along with staff comment would form part of the report going to Committee, that did not happen. Ottawa residents need to urge the mayor and councillors that without a fair and transparent consultation process, citizen engagement will continue to decline in this City.

**Going Forward:** While we are disappointed that the Wildlife Construction has been watered down, as one of the stakeholders, we recognize the substantial work done in developing the current recommendations. And, after 15 years since a Protocol was first approved by the former Regional Government in Ottawa, we are determined to see it finally move forward.

But, make no mistake. We intend to follow the City's progress in implementing this Protocol very closely and will expect to see what are its reasonable recommendations being applied to some of the large developments underway or planned over the next year.

Having an effective Wildlife Construction Protocol will be the first important test of the City's professed commitment to wildlife-sensitive planning.

# Just in Time for Christmas!



Michael Runtz's long-awaited book *'Dam Builders: The Natural History of Beavers and Their Ponds'* would make a very special Christmas gift for nature lovers in your family.

Michael, one of Canada's most highly respected naturalists and the author of ten best sellers, has laboured over this particular book for more than 20 years. The result has been worth every minute of the wait.

What makes this book so special is Michael's ability to educate and engage us on the remarkable attributes and con-

siderable environmental contribution of beavers through highly readable and disciplined prose. But, it is the exquisite coloured photographs on virtually every page of the 300-page book, almost all taken by Michael, that he uses so effectively to tell the story and draw us into a fuller appreciation of beavers and their ponds.

His passion is conveyed in the epilogue *"Beaver ponds are living Sistine Chapels; they are Moonlight Sonatas. The magnificence of these living galleries stimulates our minds and enriches our souls"*.

The book is an unbelievable bargain at \$45.00 at Chapters stores or on-line through Amazon or Chapters for \$33.75.

## Supporting the OCWC Through the United Way Campaign



We are very grateful to those people that support the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre through the annual United Way Campaign.

We hope that others, who may not be aware that the Centre is one of the charities you can help through the United Way Campaign, will consider doing so.

If you request the United Way release your name and/or donation information to the charity that you have allocated your support to, they will do so. Unfortunately, they do not provide contact information so, if you are a new donor to the Centre, we have no way to acknowledge and thank you for your support. It is why we always appreciate hearing from new donors that they've supported the Centre in this way.

The United Way is an important vehicle for directing funds to a wide range of community services. It recognizes that providing help for animals as well as people is important to ensuring a healthy and caring community.

Please consider designating a donation through the United Way Campaign to the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre. It will be put to very good use. Just make sure the Centre's full name and charitable number 13224-0284-RR0001 is noted on the donation form.

### OUR THANKS

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

*Ruth and Ray Wesenberg Wildlife Fund*



For good...forever Le bien...toujours

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